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## **From Extensive Reading to Advanced Reading Skills: A student's narrative**

**Muzdalifah Mahmud<sup>1\*</sup>, Adi Tia Mokoolang<sup>2</sup>, Syarifuddin Achmad<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo

\*Email: [muzdalifah.mahmud@ung.ac.id](mailto:muzdalifah.mahmud@ung.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

This study examines the relationship between extensive reading habits and the reading skills of English students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. Extensive reading is a reading practice that involves reading a substantial quantity of material at an appropriate level to gain a comprehensive understanding. This approach is believed to enhance reading abilities and foster a positive reading habit. This study focuses on reading as a daily practice rather than as a discrete classroom activity. The study employs interviews with three students who engage in extensive reading to ascertain their attitudes toward reading, reading frequency, reading preferences, and sources of motivation. These students exhibit positive attitudes toward reading, read frequently, enjoy various types of books, and are motivated by their family and academic environment. These habits lead to better vocabulary and reading comprehension. The study concludes that extensive reading helps improve reading skills and recommends that students make it a regular part of their lives and that teachers support and encourage extensive reading.

**Keywords:** extensive reading, reading skills, EFL students, narrative inquiry

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Reading is defined as the process where readers try to obtain new knowledge and information by reading newspapers, books, magazines, articles or even journals. In other words, reading is the way to get information in written text. By reading, the students can access much information that might have otherwise been unavailable, especially in English textbooks. In a study by Central Connecticut State University in the US published in *Jakarta Post*, Indonesia placed 60<sup>th</sup> out of 61 countries in terms of reading interest. It shows that Indonesian people have the lowest interest in reading. Specifically, the EFL students reading habits in English are low (Iftanti, 2012). Furthermore, another data from UNESCO revealed that the percentage of children in Indonesia who have an interest in reading is 0.01%. It means there are only 1 of 10.000 people in Indonesia who like to read. Moreover, Indonesian people's perspective on reading is mostly wrong, they think that reading is a boring activity and a difficult task to do, but reading can be fun, simple, and easy to do (Suzzanna, 2020).

The fostering of a reading habit constitutes a crucial element of lifelong learning and personal growth. Reading not only enriches the mind with knowledge and new perspectives but also enhances cognitive abilities, including critical thinking, empathy, and creativity. In an increasingly digital-media-rule where information is provided and consumed rapidly, developing a consistent reading habit can provide a wide opportunity for deeper content/reading materials engagement. Developing regular reading habits, whether through the pages of a compelling novel, the informative columns of a newspaper, or the vast resources available online, leads to a myriad of possibilities and ways of constant self-improvement (Krashen, 2004; Cullinan, 2000).

Many studies have been done to cultivate useful approaches and strategies for reading habits (Guthrie and Humes, 2004; Coiro, 2011; Coonan and Giorgi, 2017). One of the strategies that has been gaining popularity among teachers and students is extensive reading. Extensive reading is a type of reading where extensive reading means reading in quantity to gain a general understanding of what is read. According to Day & Bamford (2004), Extensive reading is an activity where the students read some of the material in other languages, they are free to choose the material that they want to read based on their ability level. It is intended to develop good reading habits to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure and encourage a liking for reading (Richard & Schmidt, 2002). In English as a foreign language environment, extensive reading becomes an alternative technique to teach reading and to promote students' interest in reading. Studies show that extensive reading has many positive effects and it is considered one of the most effective activities to boost learner literacy. However, when students are interested and enjoy the text they are reading, this may encourage students to read more and change students' view about reading that it is a boring activity into a fun activity where they can find new knowledge and understanding about what they read.

Extensive reading is the activity where the students read a wide variety of reading materials in any language, where they are free to choose the material from which level they want to read (Day & Bamford, 2004). Extensive reading engages students in reading wide quantities of materials in their suitable level of language, and there are one or two unfamiliar words on each page that should be unknown to students (Kredatusova, 2002). This has been gaining popularity as the strategy or a program for teaching reading in a foreign language which is students read the material as much as they want based on their interest, easy to understand, and enjoyable (Yulia, 2018).

Further, Day & Bamford (2004) proposed that this strategy aims to improve students' reading habits, let them enjoy reading, and have a general comprehension of what they read without using dictionaries. Moreover, extensive reading is also employed to increase students' positive attitudes toward reading, build vocabulary, develop good reading habits, to build vocabulary and structure knowledge (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). According to Nutall (2015), Extensive reading is the easiest and the best way to improve students skills in reading and claims that it is also easier to teach students to read better when they are in a good situation. However, the best way to improve someone's knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among it is speakers, and the next best way is to read extensively about it (Renandya, 2007).

Some studies have indicated that students can gain considerable benefits from doing extensive reading. Such benefits include enhanced vocabulary, heightened reading motivation, and an impact on English skills (Day & Bamford, 2004). Other benefits like increasing vocabulary (Nutall, 2015; Delfi & Yamat, 2017), , and developing English skills (Day & Bamford, 2004) have also been observed improving motivation to read (Benettayeb, 2010).

In terms of reading materials, extensive reading is characterized by the reading of large amounts of material for general understanding and enjoyment. It often involves a focus on overall comprehension, rather than an analysis of every detail. Two common types of reading materials that are suitable for extensive reading are graded readers and authentic materials (Day and Bamford, 2004; Grabe and Stoller, 2013; Nuttal, 2015; Renandya and Jacobs, 2002).

Graded readers are books that are specifically written for language learning. They are categorized according to a system of levels of difficulty based on the vocabulary and grammatical complexity of the material. Waring (2011) described graded readers are books written at different levels of language difficulty from beginner to advanced and are typical, but not only materials used for extensive reading. In short, graded readers can be interpreted as books that were written for foreign language learners. Graded readers are suitable resources for learners because they can select appropriate material for their levels and interests.

Additionally, Telaumbanua (2015) argued that extensive reading material should be authentic and simple. "Authenticity" generally refers to the language used by the writer in the text, which is typically considered to be original and intact for a native speaker (Telaumbanua, 2015). The term "authentic text" is also defined as "real-life text," which is not written for an academic process (Wallace, 1998). Nevertheless, authentic texts are frequently utilized as reading material for students in and out of the classroom. Authentic texts present real-life phenomena, thereby enabling students to gain exposure to the full range of language as it is used in context. This kind of extensive reading material is more engaging and learners are more enthusiastic to learn when the language is authentic

or meaningful (Apsari, 2014). The most common sources of authentic material are magazines, newspapers, literature, and so forth.

Several studies on the benefits of employing extensive reading strategies have been done for years. An experimental study focused on the effect of extensive reading found that it was strongly advised to use an extensive and pleasure reading strategy with well-accessed books, teachers' encouraging the students and sufficient reading time as key factors in developing the reading habits in low-literate adults (Rodrigo, Greenberg and Segal, 2014). Another research conducted by Tran (2018) with the title "The Benefits of Extensive Reading for Vietnamese EFL Learners" focused on finding out the positive effects of extensive reading in upgrading Vietnamese EFL students' reading fluency. The result of this study claimed that an extensive reading program was beneficial to upgrading the reading rate as well as the reading comprehension skills of the students. Lastly, a study in 2016 conducted by Suk (2016) at the National University in Southern Korea looked to prove that extensive reading has positive impacts on language learning in second and foreign language settings. The result of this research showed that extensive reading increases students' reading ability such as vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension.

Upon further investigation, some notable relations as well as distinctions can be made between the current study and those mentioned above. Both previous and current studies focused on extensive reading and its effect on reading ability. However, there are some differences. All previous studies focused on extensive reading as a program in class, while this study concentrates on narrative inquiry on how extensive reading is a habit and how it has become students' behavior in their daily lives. The objective of the present research is to get in-depth information about student experiences through their habit of reading extensively and how it affects their English skill with a focus on their reading skills

## **METHOD**

To achieve the objective of this research which is to explore the relationship between students' extensive reading habits and their reading abilities, a qualitative research method has been used. Moleong (2005) describes the qualitative method as an approach aimed at understanding the experiences of research subjects, including their behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions, by providing a detailed verbal account within a specific and natural context. The researchers chose a qualitative approach to gather data based on participants' experiences. This aligns with Creswell's (2007) assertion that the goal of the researcher is to capture participants' views by collecting data from a limited number of individuals. Another reason for using a qualitative approach is that it allows for the collection of detailed data about the subject matter without manipulating or treating the subjects.

Additionally, this research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, which focuses on describing phenomena from a naturalistic perspective (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Naturalistic analysis examines the experiences of individuals or groups in their everyday lives or specific events. According to Lambert and Lambert (2012), this design aims to provide a thorough account of explicit events experienced by individuals or groups. The researcher used this methodology to gather comprehensive data on students' extensive reading habits and their impact on their reading abilities.

The respondents for this research were selected using purposive sampling. Sugiyono (2017) proposed that purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on certain considerations. This technique was used because not all respondents met the predetermined criteria. In addition, the researcher determined the respondents based on some parameters, which are first, the respondents are students of the English Department of the State University of Gorontalo; and second, the respondents are students with extensive reading habits (this was determined through a simple preliminary interview). Through interviews and documentation, these respondents provided detailed information about their reading habits and how they affect the students' English proficiency, focusing on their reading ability/skills. By applying these, three students were deemed suitable for this research.

To understand the students' reading habits and their impact on reading proficiency, thematic analysis was used in the current study. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a method for systematically identifying, analyzing, and describing patterns or themes within data. This approach involves a thorough process of familiarizing oneself with the data, coding, developing

themes and revising to uncover meaningful patterns that shed light on the research questions. By using thematic analysis, the study aims to explore the nuances of students' reading behaviors and how these behaviors correlate with their reading proficiency. The analysis not only highlights common themes but also provides a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors that influence students' reading habits and skills.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interviews, several key points emerged regarding students' extensive reading habits and the effects of extensive reading habits on students' reading skills. The findings are discussed in the order of those objectives.

### Students' Extensive Reading Habits

#### *Motivation in reading*

When asked why they read, the three students gave various responses. The respondents said that these things motivate students to read a lot, firstly, *Family influences reading habits*. Family members often influence how people read. Respondent 1 was inspired by an older sibling who loved reading and had lots of books, which encouraged the respondent to start reading. Similarly, Respondent 3 said that their parents liked reading and watching the news, which made them want to read more so they could talk about it with their family. Second, *Personal Interest and Parental Support*. Respondent 2 said that they read a lot because they like it. This interest led to the collection of many books. The respondent's parents also supported their reading by providing money for books. In summary, family members and parents can influence students to read more. They can create an environment that encourages reading and gives students the motivation and resources to read.

#### *Academic motivation*

In addition to the influence of family, academic settings also play a role in motivating students to engage with reading material. For example, lecturers may inspire students through extensive reading courses, wherein students are afforded the freedom to select their reading material, or by recommending literature in courses deemed relevant to the curriculum. However, only one respondent explicitly mentioned receiving motivation from the academic environment, indicating that this influence, while significant, may not be as pervasive or as impactful as family influence.

#### *Attitude toward reading*

The three respondents gave different answers when asked why they like reading. Respondent 1 said, "I like reading because it helps me use my imagination. I enjoy reading and forget the time. Reading also teaches me things." Respondent 2 said, "Reading satisfies my curiosity. I need knowledge and information. I read to solve that". Respondent 3 said, "Reading is my escape. Reading is my escape from reality. Reading makes me feel better. Reading refreshes my soul when I'm bored or just want to spend my free time reading." All three respondents said they enjoy reading a lot. They said reading expands their imagination, satisfies their curiosity, and refreshes their souls. All respondents like reading. This backs up Day & Bamford's (2004) idea that when students read what they like, they like reading more. Similarly, Richards & Schmidt (2002) say that reading a lot will make students like reading more, learn new words, develop good reading habits, and learn more about vocabulary and structure.

The respondents all liked reading what they wanted, when and where they wanted. This helped them to like reading more and made them want to read more. So, reading a lot helps people to learn English better.

#### *Books read*

Based on the findings, the types of books that students prefer to read can be classified into two main categories: fiction and non-fiction. Regarding *Fiction reads*, student 1 likes reading novels, especially Harry Potter, and poetry, like Atticus Poetry; student 2 likes novels and has a lot of them, while student 3 likes comics, manga, and other fiction, especially English-translated manga, as well as novels. In terms of *Non-Fiction reads*, student 1 reads self-development books, biographies, and sometimes non-fiction if they're curious or find interesting books; while as a university student,

student 2 has become interested in linguistic and self-development books; and student 3 reads articles on topics like sexual harassment, psychology journals, and books on linguistics and economics.

In short, the students like fiction books the most. This matches what Apsari (2014) found: fiction is the most popular genre among students. Loan (2012) says literature is a popular subject for college students in the 21st century. It can also be said that the students read a variety of nonfiction, but they prefer fiction. This shows that fiction is an important part of students' reading habits.

#### *Reading frequency*

Reading frequency means how often students read for fun. Suzzanna (2020) says reading frequency shows how much students read and their reading routines. When inquired how often they read, the students presented a variety of answers. Student 1 reads almost every day, spending 2 to 3 hours daily, and up to 5 or 6 hours during the pandemic, especially when reading favorite novels like Harry Potter; student 2 reads more often with new books, finishes a book in 3 days and reads at least one book a week; meanwhile, student 3 said that he/she need to set schedule when it comes to reading. If a book is interesting, she can read it all day. Further, she usually reads two to three days a week, but sometimes doesn't read at all if nothing is interesting.

Their responses indicated that reading frequency varies, but respondents are generally interested in reading. They read almost every day or several times a week. How much time is spent on reading depends on what is available and if it is interesting. All respondents read often. How often they read depends on what they read. Students read more when they like what they're reading. Hamdini (2018) says students who read often read almost every day or several times a week. Those who read less read rarely or not at all. Students' reading frequency shows how interested they are in reading.

#### **The Impact of Extensive Reading on Reading Ability**

The question of whether reading a lot made the students learn new vocabulary elicited various answers. One student stated that his vocabulary has significantly increased since started reading English books. Another said that she noticed a significant vocabulary increase. Words that she claimed were unknown before she started reading extensively. And the third one claimed that she started to notice that her vocabulary was getting bigger in number. In short, all respondents agreed that their vocabulary has grown a lot because they read a lot. They said they learned new words from different reading materials. Nutall (2015) said that reading a lot is a good way to improve vocabulary and reading skills.

In terms of strategies, the respondents used different strategies to improve their vocabulary. Respondent 1 keeps a notebook to write down new words and look up their meanings. They post these notes on their wall or desk. Respondent 2 uses a dictionary or *Google Translate* when they don't know a word. Respondent 3 also uses *Google Translate*.

All respondents said that reading a lot has helped them learn new words. They use notebooks, dictionaries or translation tools to understand new words. This makes reading more fun and helps them learn new words. Hidayat & Rohati (2020) say that vocabulary notebooks are good because students can easily review and reinforce their knowledge of new words.

Further, to see if reading comprehension improved with extensive reading. Here are the participants' responses: One stated that *before* he had to read it several times to understand and *After* he found that he understands text more quickly. This led to the conclusion that reading helps him understand texts better. Another indicated that for her *Before* she often encountered trouble understanding key ideas in texts, *After* reading she found that it is easier to get important info and main ideas, thanks to more growing words. This indicated that for her, the text-comprehension skill is becoming easier and faster due to reading and vocabulary. The third student intimated that *Before*: "I had trouble understanding reading materials." *After*: "Understands the content better, identifies the author's message, and reads faster." The conclusion is reading helped her to understand and read the texts faster.

All respondents agreed on several points. First, they said that reading a lot helped them understand reading better. Second, reading more has led to texts being easier and quicker to understand. Third, they can identify main ideas and important information more easily. And the last, students admitted that they can also understand texts better and read more quickly.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION (12pt)**

The research looked at how reading in depth affects students' reading abilities. It focused on three students from the English Department at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. The study used a qualitative approach to identify six themes related to the students' reading habits: motivation, attitude, books read, reading frequency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Each person had their reasons for reading and liked it. They read different kinds of books often. The respondents said that reading a lot helped them learn new words and understand more. The study showed that reading a lot helps students read better. The students' learning outcome cards showed they did well in reading-related subjects.

This research recommended that students engage in extensive reading daily and continue this practice beyond the college level to maintain and enhance their reading abilities. It is also recommended that teachers encourage and motivate students to read regularly and assist them in developing a strong interest in reading, particularly in English.

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